



Environment Department

SUSANA MARTINEZ, GOVERNOR

Ryan Flynn, Cabinet Secretary
Butch Tongate, Deputy Secretary

NEWS ADVISORY

August 15, 2015, 8 p.m.

NMED's mission is to protect and restore the environment and to foster a healthy and prosperous New Mexico for present and future generations.

Contact: Allison Scott Majure
Communications Director
New Mexico Environment Department
505.231.8800 | Allison.majure@state.nm.us

New Mexico Departments of Environment, Health, and Game & Fish Lift Ban on Water Systems' Supply Connection to Animas and San Juan Rivers and on Public's Recreational Use of Rivers

Governor Susana Martinez' Long-Term Impact Review Team in Place

(Aztec & Farmington, NM) – New Mexico Environment Department Secretary Ryan Flynn, Game and Fish Department Director Alexa Sandoval, and Health Department Secretary Retta Ward today lifted the ban on San Juan County's drinking water systems' supply connection to the Animas and San Juan Rivers and on the public's recreational use of the rivers with certain prudent health practices, following the August 5th Gold King Mine Spill.

"Because the waters of the Animas and San Juan Rivers are now meeting all applicable water quality standards, the Environment Department, with the state's multi-agency team, lifts the ban on water systems' supply connections to the Animas and San Juan rivers and on the public's recreational use of the rivers in concurrence with local officials and the US Environmental Protection Agency," said Environment Secretary Ryan Flynn.

On Friday August 7th the New Mexico Environment Department began collecting water chemistry and other data from the rivers immediately following the state's August 6th notification from the EPA of the approach of contamination from the Gold King Mine Spill. Sampling and analysis continued throughout the following days. The data show that all levels of contamination related to the Gold King Mine spill—primarily heavy metals, such as lead, cadmium and copper—are below all applicable state water quality standards including those established to protect human health. Today's announcement is based on these results.

Recreational users of the Animas and San Juan rivers may notice some discoloration in the sediment along the river banks due to the spill. While there is continuing concern by New Mexico officials for long-term river health and for that of aquatic life, the Environment and Health Departments do not anticipate adverse human health effects due to exposure to contaminated sediment during typical recreational activities.

Environment and Health recommend that the public may use the rivers, with the following prudent health practices, when contacting sediment and surface water as recommended by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease registry (ATSDR):

1. Don't drink untreated water from the river.

2. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after contact with the sediment and surface water.
3. Avoid contact in areas where there is visible discoloration in sediment or river water.
4. Wash clothes after contact with sediment and surface water.

“As the Animas River re-opens, I strongly urge all New Mexicans to follow some basic recommendations when using any rivers or lakes for recreational purposes,” said Department of Health Cabinet Secretary Retta Ward, MPH. “The recommendations include wearing suitable clothing, using safety gear and immediately showering and towel drying after getting out of the water. Take extra care not to ingest surface water. When you consume untreated water from surface sources, you run the risk of ingesting harmful bacteria, parasites, viruses and other potential contaminants.”

Along with recreational use, “Catch and Release” fishing is also recommended at this time. Alexa Sandoval, Director of New Mexico’s Game and Fish Department said, “The Department suggests that anglers practice catch and release of fish in the Animas and San Juan Rivers that have been impacted by the spill. Until Game and Fish can determine the level of contamination in the fish, we are strongly recommending that anglers not eat the fish they catch. We are working to determine the level of contamination in the fish and we will notify the public of the results of our tests.”

New Mexico agency representatives on the Long-Term Impact Review Team for the Gold King Mine Spill (Environment, State Engineer, Agriculture, Game and Fish, Health, Homeland Security, and others), along with the US EPA and local officials, continue assessing the full impact of the August 5th event on the state for the continuing development of safe practice recommendations for the San Juan County region.

#